

ORIENTALIA CHRISTIANA ANALECTA
256

SYMPOSIUM SYRIACUM VII

Uppsala University, Department of Asian and African Languages
11 – 14 August 1996

edited by
René Lavenant, S.J.

ESTRATTO



PONTIFICIO ISTITUTO ORIENTALE
PIAZZA S. MARIA MAGGIORE, 7
I-00185 ROMA
1998

Ewa Balicka-Witakowska

Remarks on the Decoration and Iconography of the Syriac Gospels, British Library, Add. 7174*

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to a very unusual Syriac manuscript which has hitherto remained almost unknown to scholarship. I refer to the Evangelistary in the Peshitta version in the British Museum, catalogued as Add. 7174. The manuscript has previously been noted by J. Leroy in his catalogue of illuminated Syriac manuscripts following the earlier short description by F. Rosen and J. Forshall.¹

Information about the history of the book is not to be found in the colophon but in the notes on the folios 206 et 213.² These state that the manuscript was written in the year 1499 AD by a certain Elias in Mosul, for the church dedicated to James Dismembered and St. George at Tell Ziqufa.³

The Evangelistary belongs to the class of the *codex de luxe* and a lot of effort has been devoted to making it as splendid as possible. However the way this manuscript was written and decorated is very unusual, giving it a special place in the history of the Syriac manuscripts.

The codex is of parchment with 219 folios which measure approximately 35x23 cm. These dimensions have been increased by about 5 cm in the process of restoration and rebinding undertaken at the beginning of the 18th century. On this occasion the parchment leaves were glued to

*Abbreviations:

Leroy, *Mss. Syr.* J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 77), Paris 1964.

London, BL London, British Library
Paris, BN Paris, Bibliothèque nationale
Rome, BV Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana

¹ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 396-403; F. Rosen & J. Forshall, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum orientalium qui in Museo Britannico asservantur. Pars I: Codices syriacos et carshunicos amplectans*, London 1835, nr. XXX, p. 51-53.

² Rosen & Forshall, *Catalogus* (see n. 1 above), p. 52.

³ North-west of Mosul, cf. C. Sachau, *Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien*, Leipzig 1883, p. 361.

larger paper leaves and two pages of paper with drawings were added at the beginning and end of the book.⁴

The manuscript is written in a very skilled hand in large *estrangelo* characters. In the ordinary text, divided into two columns, the characters are about 1 or 1.5 cm tall, whereas in the titles they are as much as 4 cm tall. The latter are painted rather than written. The characters there are often decorated with a pattern of white and brown dots. Especially 'ālahph takes a picturesque form, very like a giraffe (fig. 1).

The ink used for the ordinary text is black. For the titles and rubrics black with red punctuation (or vice versa), red and gold. Moreover the readings for Palm Sunday and Easter are written in gold throughout, with black punctuation marks (fig. 2). The ends of the chapters or paragraphs are decoratively marked by squares and rectangles filled with coloured vegetation patterns, starlike crosses and interlacings. The numeration of the chapters and paragraphs is inserted into the *culs-de-lampe* and other scribal flourishings with a variety of forms and colours⁵ (fig. 3).

The most advanced stage in the decoration is represented by a cross-carpet page placed on the folio 22r (fig. 4). It is composed of stylised vegetation motifs tinted in red, pale green and yellow. The central field is occupied by a Greek cross composed of four large leaves. Leaves of the same kind but diminished to half-size constitute a sort of frame. The area between them is filled by small wine leaves and vines arranged symmetrically.

If full-page crosses are common in Greek, Latin and Oriental manuscripts, especially in the Gospel Books,⁶ cross-carpet pages occur in a group of Syriac manuscripts written and decorated in the region of Mosul.⁷ One of the oldest examples is the 16th century *Borgianus 169*

⁴ W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1870-72, Appendix A, p. 1204.

⁵ It seems that according to Syrian tradition this aspect of book decoration as well as the crosses and carpet pages were usually made by the scribe, while the miniatures were produced by the painter, Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 406-407. I could observe the same division of work when the scribe *malphono* Asmar al-Khouri († 1993) worked on the hand-written Evangelary now printed in the St. Ephrem Monastery in The Netherlands. In addition to the text he produced the carpet pages, head-pieces and other page-decorations but the miniatures he ordered from a German painter.

⁶ E. Dinkler & E. Dinkler-von Schubert, Kreuz, [in:] *Realenzyklopädie zur byzantinischen Kunst* 5 (1991), cols 172-74.

⁷ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 406-407.

(Rome, BV) which copies a model from the end of the 13th century⁸ (fig. 5).

The idea of a cross embedded in a square pattern is however much older. It goes back to the early Christian era when veiled cross symbolism was preferred.⁹ It seems that a similar idea is present on our page as well. The cross is hardly discernible among other motives. However we are not dealing here with the usual decoration of cross-carpet pages which use distinct geometrical elements to build up and emphasise a form of the cross. In our miniature everything is composed of curved vegetal motifs¹⁰ which makes the page very similar to a carpet or a piece of textile. J. Leroy who did not recognize a cross on this page, only a carpet-like decoration, recalls Turkish tapestries from 16th century as a parallel.¹¹

Another striking feature of this miniature is its place in the manuscript. It does not open or close the codex but faces the representation of the Baptism of Christ and the text of Matthew telling of this event.

According to a very ancient tradition full page crosses or carpet-pages at the beginning and at the end of a manuscript, primarily in the Gospels, had a special rôle.¹² They solemnly announced and closed the sacred text and protected the book as apotropaic signs. It is difficult to know why in our manuscript the carpet-page received such an unusual placing. It does not mark any special division of the text, nor of the miniature cycle. The reading concerning the Baptism is important but not the most important for an Evangelistary. Perhaps some practical cause, not obvious to us, lay behind this arrangement.¹³

⁸ A. Stegenšek, "Eine syrische Miniaturenhandschrift des Museo Borgiano", *OC* 1 (1901) 343-355.

⁹ C. Nordenfalk, "An Illustrated Diatessaron", *Art Bulletin* 50:1 (1968) 124, n. 27.

¹⁰ The symbolic meaning of the cross decorated with or composed of vegetal motifs is well known, cf. J. Fleming, "Kreuz und Pflanzenornament", *Byzantinoslavica* 30 (1969) 88-115, but it is very unlikely that it was used consciously by our painter. The miniature seems to have a purely decorative character.

¹¹ O. van Falke, *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, Berlin 1921, figs. 517-518. The similar patterns are to be found not only on Turkish carpets but also on the book covers and textiles from the same time, cf. for instance M. Sözen, *The Evolution of Turkish Art and Architecture*, Istanbul 1987, fig. 164; T. Öz, *Turkish Textiles and Velvets: XIV-XVI Century*, Ankara 1950, pl. XIX. We can observe however that they were never arranged as in our Syrian miniature, i.e. in the form of a cross.

¹² Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 113-125; E. Dinkler & E. Dinkler-von Schubert, *Kreuz*: (n. 6), cols 169-174.

¹³ It is possible that this accidental inserting of the carpet pages in the text is typical for the group of the Gospel Books produced in Mosul area between the 12th and the 13th century, cf. Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 407, n. 1.

The manuscript is illustrated with nine miniatures including the two on the additional paper pages inserted as the first and the last folio. The first of them represents four writing evangelists placed in circular fields and a stylized flowering bush in the middle, the second the Twelve Apostles arranged in two rows and shown under arches.¹⁴ Since both subjects fit very well as the introductory and closing picture in an Evangelistary it is possible that they copy and replace original, damaged miniatures.

The miniatures in the parchment do not represent a very high artistic level. We may call them coloured drawings rather than painted miniatures. The play of colours is mostly limited to green, red and the colour of the parchment. Sometimes dark blue and brown appear. The quality of the pigments is bad and in many places the colour has faded away.

The miniatures are in various forms but none occupies a full page. They are surrounded by simple red or beige frames. The most striking feature of these pictures is however their position on the page in relation to the text. All of them are turned 90 degrees. This lack of concern for the consistency of viewpoint is not unusual in the Syriac manuscripts. We may mention here other books such as the collection of *memre* in the Patriarchal Library in Homs or the Gospels in the Harvard College Library.¹⁵ The same phenomenon also occurs in some Armenian manuscripts. We can observe it for instance in the group of the manuscripts which shows the four Evangelists depicted in on one miniature.¹⁶ The unusual position of these pictures is however less disturbing in comparison with the Syriac ones because usually there is no text on these pages.

According to A. Grabar the horizontal arrangement of the pictures is accidental and has no special significance.¹⁷ We will see however that in the case of our manuscript it may indicate that the rôle of the picture has changed from illustrating the text to decorating the manuscript.

¹⁴ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, pl. 151:1 and 151:2.

¹⁵ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, pl. 61:2; L. Nees, "Two Illuminated Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library", *Cahiers archéologiques* 29 (1980-81) 123-142 et figs 2-3.

¹⁶ L. A. Durnovo, *Miniatures arméniennes*, Erevan 1969, pl. 16; V. Der Nersessian, *Armenian Illuminated Gospel-Books*, London 1988, p. 30; D. Kouymjian, "Armenian Manuscript Illumination in the Formative Period: Text Groups, Eusebian Apparatus, Evangelists' Portraits", [in:] *Il Caucaso: Cerniera fra Culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (secoli IV-XI)*, (Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 43), Spoleto 1996, p. 1047-48, figs 33-40.

¹⁷ A. Grabar, "Les illustrations des Beatus mozarabes et les miniatures orientales chrétiennes et juives", *Cahiers archéologiques* 28 (1989) 10-11.

The style of the miniatures is very specific. It is easy to observe that the influence of Islamic painting is stronger here than in many other Syriac miniatures. The scenes are represented on a background of uniform colour, often decorated with vegetation, making it very like a fabric. The composition of the scenes shows a tendency to place the figures in such a way that they are aligned to the sides of the frame or towards the corners. Sitting figures have squat proportions. The faces are pear-shaped with elongated eyes. The beards are short and triangular, the moustaches thin and hanging down — feature obviously borrowed from the Mongol painting tradition.¹⁸ The red dots used for modelling on the cheeks and forehead must be a heritage from Mamluk miniatures.¹⁹ We can even observe the eyebrows drawn with single lines, a method typical of old Arab painting.²⁰ The garments and accessories probably reflect the contemporary dress of the Mosul area. From the stylistic point of view the best comparative material is to be found in the Turkish manuscript containing *Hurşidname* of Cemalızade (Paris, BN, turc. 355) also written and decorated about the year 1500 (fig. 6).²¹

The miniatures represent the christological cycle and the scenes seem to be chosen so that they cover all the periods of Christ's life.

The first scene (fol. 12 r) displays twelve persons in three rows on a red background with a vegetation pattern (fig. 7). Shown in three-quarter view with the same gesture — left hand raised — they seem to move from right to left towards a decorative element outside the frame containing the character *beth* for number 2. All wear long garments and tripartite headgear.

The figures themselves are treated decoratively. Their dress is of alternating colour: a garment of the colour of the parchment is matched by brown shoes and a turban while a brown garment is completed by a turban and shoes in the colour of the parchment.

J. Leroy in his catalogue description of the scene connects these persons with the twelve apostles. Later however he makes the suggestion

¹⁸ See for instance: *Oriental Miniatures of Abu Raihon Beruni Institute of Orientology of the Uz[bek]SSR Academy of Sciences*, Tashkent 1980, fig. 5.

¹⁹ T. W. Arnold & A. Grohmann, *The Islamic Book: a Contribution to its Art and History from the VII-XVIII Century*, Paris 1929, figs 45-47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, figs 31-35.

²¹ *Vers l'Orient*, Paris 1983, (The catalogue of the Exposition in the Bibliothèque nationale), nr. 3; *Türkische Kunst und Kultur aus osmanischer Zeit*, Recklinghausen 1985, (Ausstellungskatalog), nr. 1/5.

that they may represent the Magi.²² It seems that this latter hypothesis is correct. Firstly we observe that the chapter 2 of Matthew, telling the story of the Wise Men starts on the next page. It contains the following passage: "The star they (the Magi) had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the Child was". If we look closer at the decorative element placed outside the miniature with twelve persons we realize that it represents a stylised eight-armed star²³ which also serves as frame for the number 2, obviously referring to chapter two of Matthew.²⁴ The twelve persons seem to be following the star and pointing to it. Since the Nativity is represented on the next page we may surmise that the painter intended to illustrate the fragment of the text quoted above. Another argument for such an interpretation of the scene concerns the secondary inscription added in the margin of the page identifying the twelve persons as *mgūšē* i.e. Magi.

The Magi who follow the star appear very early in the group of monuments which show the story of the kings divided into episodes. On the so-called ambo from Saloniki, dated to the 5th century (Istanbul, Archeological Museums), the first episode represents the Magi as travelling, the second as bringing gifts to Jesus.²⁵ The relief from the ciborium of San Marco in Venice, usually dated to the 6th century, represents the Magi consulting a sphere, a manuscript and the stars, the dream of Herod, and finally the Adoration itself.²⁶

In Syriac literature in addition to the tradition of the Three Wise Men we also find one saying that they were twelve in number. We learn their

²² Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 397.

²³ It is possible that this element derives from the decoration of carpet-pages in the Koran, cf. for instance some examples written in Mosul, *In Pursuit of Excellence: Works of Art from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts*, Istanbul 1993, pl. 10 A-B, but in the Syrian miniature its function is changed: from a purely decorative form the star was transformed into an important iconographical element of the scene with the Magi.

²⁴ K. Καλοκύρης, *Τό άστρον τέσ βήθεέμ είς τήν Βυζαντινήν τέχνην*, Thessaloniki 1969; F. Deichmann, "Zur Erscheinung des Sternes von Bethlehem", [in:] *Vivarium: Festschrift Theodor Klauser zum 90 Geburtstag*, (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum: Ergänzungsband 11), Münster 1984, p. 98-106; B. T. Viviano, "The Movement of the Star, Matt 2:9 and Num 9:17", *Revue Biblique* 103 (1996) 58-64.

²⁵ H. Leclercq, "Mages", *DAcL* 10:1 (1931) figs 7467-7470; W. F. Volbach, *Frühchristliche Kunst: Die Kunst der Spätantike in West- und Ostrom*, München 1958, pls 78-79.

²⁶ The relief is on the column B which has not been studied yet from the iconographical point of view, cf. J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'Enfance de la Vierge dans l'empire byzantin et en Occident*, Bruxelles 1964/65, p. 169.

names from the story called *On the revelation of the Magi*... the text of which is known from the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre written in 775. Since the same story, but in an abbreviated form, is contained in a Latin commentary called *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*, dated to the end of the 5th century, we may surmise that the Syriac original of the story was composed earlier. The *Cave of Treasures* tells of three Magi but in the text known as the *History of the Blessed Virgin Mary* it is said that three kings with nine men arrived in Bethlehem — a kind of reconciliation of the two traditions.²⁷

In a letter of Jacob of Edessa († 708) we find information about the Magi of a special importance for the history of iconography. He wrote: "The Magi ... were not just three as the painters with their colours show people, having heard about the three gifts ... but twelve as the more exact written story tells...."²⁸ The opinion of Jacob is quoted by the Syrian chroniclers Michael the Syrian (12th C.) and Bar Hebraeus (13th C.). Also Solomon of Basrah (13th C.) in his *Book of the Bee* writes about twelve Magi whom he divides into three groups according to the three kinds of gifts.²⁹

The tradition about the twelve Magi has not been known to find expression in the visual arts. Most of the representations, the Syrian included, depict only three Wise Men, just as Jacob of Edessa observed.³⁰ Occasionally they are two or four. The former variant appears for instance in the paintings in Saints Peter and Marcellinus in Rome, dated to the third century and in a Coptic textile in Athen, Benaki Museum, dated to the 7th century,³¹ the latter in the painting in the catacombs of Domitilla in Rome, in the Armenian Gospels, Matenadaran 6201, or in the

²⁷ W. Witakowski, "The Magi in Syriac Tradition", *Vox Patrum* (Poland) 1997, (forthcoming).

²⁸ Text quoted in: E. Nestle, *Brevis linguae Syriacae grammatica...*, Carlsruhe 1881, p. PD (= 84), 4-6.

²⁹ Witakowski, "The Magi in Syriac Tradition" (see n. 27 above).

³⁰ For examples see G. Vezin, *L'Adoration et le cycle des mages dans l'art chrétien primitif*, Paris 1950.

³¹ Cemetery, the crypt of the Virgin Mary and the cubiculum 54, J. Wilpert, *Eine Cyclus christologischer Gemälde aus der Katakomben der heiligen Petrus und Marcellinus*, Freiburg 1891, pls I-V:1; L. De Chaves, "La Fuite en Egypte et le retour des mages", médaillon copte de la collection du Benaki Museum", *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 33 (1994) 57-62, pl. I.

Christian Arabic manuscript containing the *Arabic Gospel of Infancy*, in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, (Med. Pal. orient. 387).³²

We know only one example which shows twelve Wise Men. It is the coloured drawing made by a certain Abraham in 1908 together with other pictures representing scenes from Jesus' life, incorporated in a Syriac Gospel Book, today preserved in St. Petersburg, Oriental Institute, (Ms. Diettrich nr.1).³³ It shows the Virgin Mary sitting in the centre with Jesus on her knees, flanked by twelve Magi arranged in two rows of six. Each of them brings a gift (fig. 8). A very long inscription written around the picture contains two quotations from Matthew (2:1b-2; 2:11) and a short poem on the twelve Magi bringing the gifts.³⁴

As we see, the only thing common to our miniature and the picture by Abraham is the number of the Magi. It is obvious that the painters did not follow any established iconographical tradition. Both illustrated a Syriac apocryphon but each according to his own conception.

The miniature representing the Nativity follows directly that of the Magi and occupies the verso side of the same folio (fig. 9). It is composed of two parts: the upper part is placed on the page in the usual way, while the lower is turned 90 degrees. In the centre of the upper part the Virgin Mary is represented. Only her head, covered by a dark blue *maphorion*, is visible; the rest of her body is covered by a rectangle representing a kind of coverlet. To her right the small child wrapped in cloth is lying on a green mattress. The ox and the ass which are usually present in the rendering of the Nativity are not depicted. On the left side a female figure

³² J. Wilpert, *Roma sotterranea: Le pitture delle catacombe romane*, Roma 1903, pl. 161:1; L. Zakaryan, *Iz istorii vaspurakanskoy miniatyuri*, Erevan 1980, fig. 1; J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Le cycle des Mages dans l'Évangile arabe de l'Enfance du Christ à Florence*, [in:] *Mélanges d'Islamologie dédiés à la mémoire de A. Abel par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis*, Bruxelles 1976, vol. II, p. 287-94, fig. 2. In a Cappadocian painting in the New Church of Tokalı Kilisse they are six, but it seems that we are dealing here with two episodes represented together: the Magi following an angel and looking at the sky, and the Adoration itself, Vezin, *L'Adoration et le cycle des mages* (see n. 30 above), pl. XII, and G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin: les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, Paris 1925-34, t. 2:1, p. 329-30, pl. 75:2.

³³ N. Pigulevskaia, "Manuscrits syriaques bibliques de Léningrad", *Revue Biblique* 47 (1938) 87-88; Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 426. At present the code of the manuscript is Syr. 26. The drawings are glued to pages which originally belonged to another manuscript containing the sermons of Jacob of Serug.

³⁴ *Bə-yawmātā d-Ag(u)štos Qēsar malkay Pāres mægūšē tra'sar dāšnā l-Yēšū' qarreb[(w)] w-lā ḥasar(w) w-'al Hērōdes 'aqlīw wə-amsar(w)...* — "In the days of Augustus Caesar, the kings of Persia, twelve Magi, brought gifts to Jesus and did not fail. And they held Herod in low esteem and contempt..."

sits and stretches her right hand towards Mary. She wears a robe in the colour of the parchment and a green head-dress. In the left corner we can recognise the figure of a lying man who must represent Joseph sleeping. Sketched in black ink he is almost invisible between the vegetation designs which cover the background.

We may also remark the compositional peculiarity of this scene. The painter applied two different points of view: the so-called bird's eye perspective for the coverlet of the Virgin Mary, the Child in its mattress and Joseph, but for the head of Mary and for the figure of the midwife the so-called frog's eye perspective.³⁵ This method is known from the Jewish and Mozarabic artistic traditions but is primarily used by Syrian painters. Let us recall here the most spectacular example, the Last Supper in the Gospel Book in London, BL, Or. 7169.³⁶

The lower part of the Nativity has the neutral parchment-coloured background decorated with floral motifs. We can see there five persons with their right hands raised, moving from right to left, i.e. towards the Virgin Mary. They wear similar clothing to that of the Magi but more colourful. The inscription added by a second hand identifies the Virgin Mary, the Child as *Msihā* — the Christ, the female figure as Mary's midwife and the figures from the lower part of the miniature as the shepherds.

Since the page which precedes this miniature contains the passage from the second chapter of Luke reading "... (the shepherds) hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child....", we may be sure that this scene is intended to illustrate the quoted fragment.

In the Eastern iconographical tradition the Arrival of the Shepherds is not very common scene. The early Christian and Byzantine art preferred to combine the Nativity with the Annunciation to the shepherds³⁷ as we can see for instance on the column B of the ciborium in San Marco or in the mosaics of John VII in Rome.³⁸ However the shepherds approaching

³⁵ Grabar, "Les illustrations des Beatus mozarabes" (see n. 17 above), figs 6-8, 12.

³⁶ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, fig. 129:1. See also *ibid.*, figs 120:2, 121:2.

³⁷ G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile aux XIV^e, XV^e et XVI^e siècles*, Paris 1916, p. 114-135.

³⁸ See note 26 and W. de Grüneisen, *Sainte Marie Antique*, Rome 1911, pl. (IC)XXI, fig. 83. The shepherds in the manuscript London, BL, Add. 7169, (Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, fig. 118:1) did not belong to the Nativity but should be seen as the part of the symbolic scene of the Adoration which shows Mary enthroned and the Child ap-

the crib appear quite often in the early Ethiopian manuscripts and in the miniatures of the Vaspurakan school.³⁹ As the figures who symbolise mankind awaiting salvation and witness to the birth of the Saviour they were often represented with their hands raised to express excitement and veneration for the Child. Generally Syrian artists adopted the Early Christian and Byzantine formula of the scene as we can see for instance in the miniature in the Gospel Books in London, BL, Add. 7170 and in Rome, BV, Syr. 559.⁴⁰

Although the Gospels do not mention how many shepherds came to the crib, three is the number that has been universally depicted, also by the Syrian artists. However in our miniature they are five — a rare tradition which is to be found in Cappadocia, in two churches: Kokar Kilise and Pürenli seki kilisesi, where they are named by the words creating the magic square: Sator, Arepo etc.⁴¹

The upper part of the miniature also differs from the common scheme of the Nativity. The Virgin Mary hidden under the geometrical coverlet represents the focal centre of the composition. She has no direct connection with the Child, who is consigned to a corner, or even partly left outside the frame of the miniature. The person whose importance seems to be underlined here, both by her almost central position and her size, is the midwife.

In Eastern and Syrian representations of the Nativity, which as a rule include the scene of Jesus being bathed, a midwife regularly receives a place. She plunges the Child into a chalice-shaped bath or holds Him on her knees while another midwife brings a jug of water.⁴² However this very old iconographical motif, which was created independently from the

proached by the Magi and the shepherds. The early representation of this type is known from the Monza pilgrim phials, A. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza – Bobbio)*, Paris 1958, pls I, II, IV, VIII.

³⁹ S. Chojnacki, "The Nativity in Ethiopian Art", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 13:2 (1975) 14-21; G. Akopyan, *Vaspurakanska Miniatyura*, Erevan 1989, figs 2, 23, 40, 60, pl. XVII. Cf. also the wall-painting in Deir-es Suryani, H. G. White & E. White, *The Monasteries of the Wādi 'n Natrun*, III, New York 1933, pl. LXI.

⁴⁰ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, pl. 76:1-2.

⁴¹ N. & M. Thierry, *Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce: région du Hasan Daği*, Paris 1963, p. 120-22, figs 27, 32.

⁴² See for instance the miniatures in the following Gospel Books: in Mar Giwargis of Qaraqoş, in the Syro-Orthodox Archbishopric in Midyat, in London, BL, Or. 7170, in Rome, BV, Syr. 559, Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, figs 143, 102:1, 76:1-2.

textual sources,⁴³ is not represented in our miniature. Since the midwife seems to stretch her hand towards the Virgin Mary or to touch her coverlet we may surmise that the painter intended to represent here the episode of the doubting Salome seeking help for her withered hand, a topic developed by the *Protoevangelium of James*. As the early parallels for this rare scene we may recall the Coptic wall-painting in Al-Mu'allaqah church dated to the 5th, and the ivory relief of Maximianus' throne in Ravenna, dated to the 6th century.⁴⁴

Neither is the figure of Joseph in our miniature of the usual kind. In the Eastern pictorial tradition he is represented as sitting opposite Mary and passively resting his head on his hand.⁴⁵ Another variant, showing him turning away from Mary and the Child, seems to express the idea that he was not the father of Jesus.⁴⁶ Both types were used by the Syrian painters as we can see for instance in the miniatures of the manuscripts London, BL, Add. 7162 and Or. 3372.⁴⁷

In our miniature however Joseph seems to be asleep, which suggests that the painter interpolated into his version of the Nativity the scene of Joseph's second dream concerning the departure to Egypt which is also narrated in the second chapter of Matthew. Usually it is represented separately and contains the figure of an angel⁴⁸ omitted in our miniature.

⁴³ M. Lawrence, *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honour of Edwin Panofsky*, New York 1961, vol. I, p. 323-34; J. Nordhagen, "The Origin of the Washing of the Child in the Nativity Scene", *BZ* 54 (1961) 333-37; E. Kitzinger, "The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art", *DOP* 17 (1968) 100-105.

⁴⁴ Nabil Selim Atalla, *Coptic Art: Wall-Paintings*, Cairo (no date), ill. of back-cover; W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, Mainz 1952, no. 140, pl. 73; G. Bovini, *La cattedra eburnea del vescovo Massimiano di Ravenna*, Faenza 1957. Three other representations from the 6th century: the ivory plaques in Manchester, London and Berlin as well as the painting in the catacombs of St. Valentine in Rome, dated to the 7th century, depict Salome touching not the Virgin Mary but the crib, A. Quacquarelli, "La conscenza della Natività della iconografia dei primi secoli attraverso gli apocrifi", *Vetera Christianorum* 25 (1988) 207-215, figs 15-18.

⁴⁵ J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Iconography of the Cycle of the Infancy of Christ", [in:] *The Kariye Djami, vol. IV: Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. P. Underwood, Princeton 1975, p. 209-11.

⁴⁶ A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, Princeton 1968, p. 130.

⁴⁷ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, figs 118:1 and 65.

⁴⁸ Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Iconography" (see n. 45 above), p. 225-26. Cf. the Syrian examples in the manuscripts: London, BL, Add. 7170, Add. 7169 and Rome, BV, Syr. 559, Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, figs 75:1-2, 121:1.

Taking the Nativity scene as a whole we can conclude that also in this case the painter composed an independent formulation of the subject, based more on literary than on pictorial tradition.

The scene which represents the Baptism of Christ (fol. 21v) is limited to two persons (fig. 4). Jesus completely naked is sitting in yellow water in which three large fish swim. He looks very Mongolian with his triangular beard, thin moustache and hair tied up on the top of his head. The Baptist, wearing a long blue garment, a blue turban and black shoes, is standing on a bank represented as a red surface patterned with vines. He stretches his hand over Christ's head. The added inscriptions identify the two persons by their names.

Although the miniature directly follows the text of Matthew which reads: "At that moment heaven was opened and he (Jesus) saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my son..."", there is no dove in the miniature. The act of baptism alone is depicted. The omission of the dove, a ray of light or a *manus dei* which would indicate the presence of God is surprising because these elements are important in explaining that the Baptism of Jesus was an event of divine epiphany.⁴⁹ They are always present, even in the earliest representations such as that of the Rabboula Gospels, which uses the scheme limited to two persons, just as our miniature does.⁵⁰ The later Syrian tradition adopted a pre-iconoclastic Byzantine scheme which includes the elements already mentioned, the angels, a column bearing a cross standing in the water, a tree with an axe alluding to John's sermon of repentance, and sometimes the personification of the River Jordan.⁵¹ None of these can be found in our miniature. Instead, in the water behind Jesus a pulpit or a little stool is depicted. This curious object may be identified with the help of the Baptism scene from the manuscript con-

⁴⁹ G. de Jerphanion, "'Epiphanie et Théophanie': le Baptême de Jésus dans la liturgie et dans l'art chrétien", *La voix des monuments* NS, Paris 1930, 165-88; Ch. Walter, "Baptism in Byzantine Iconography", *Sobornost* 2:2 (1980) 8-25. Such an abbreviated formula accompanied by the personification of the Jordan, painted separately, but close by, illustrates the psalm CXIII:3 in the Greek Psalter, London, BL, Add. 19352, fol. 154r, S. Der Nersessian, *L'illustration des psautiers grecs du Moyen Age II: Londres, Add. 19352*, Paris 1970, fig. 248.

⁵⁰ C. Cecchelli & G. Furlani & M. Salmi, *The Rabbula Gospels: Facsimile Edition of the Miniatures of the Syriac Manuscript Plut. I. 56 in the Medicean Laurentian Library*, Olten-Lausanne 1959, fol. 4v.

⁵¹ Cf. the manuscripts: Paris, BN, Syr. 355, Rome, BV, Syr. 559, London, BL, Add. 7169 and the Gospel Book in Deir ez-Za'farān, Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, pls 67:1, 79:1, 121:1, 128:2.

taining *Al-Aṣār al-Bāqiyah 'an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyah* (Chronology of the World) by al-Birūnī (Edinburgh, University Library, ms. 161) written 1307.⁵² In the water in front of Jesus we can see a kind of desk with shoes on it (fig. 10).

The next miniature (fol. 97v) represents the Entry into Jerusalem (fig. 11). Christ, this time depicted as a youngish man, is dressed in a red garment and a white turban. He rides a donkey side-saddle and his right hand is raised. Ten persons wearing long garments and turbans are coming towards him. Originally they held branches which are now almost invisible. A large vegetation motif which can hardly be recognised behind the figure of Christ must represent a tree. The added inscription reads: "The ceremony of the Entry of Our Lord into Jerusalem".

Here the deviation of our miniature from the usual iconography of the scene, which was otherwise adopted by the Syrians,⁵³ is obvious. No apostles are following Jesus. Nor do we see the city gate or boys spreading garments on the road or climbing trees. The people meeting Jesus do not form a procession but seem to be coming from all directions. A similar composition appears in the miniature at present inserted to another manuscript written in Mosul, the Gospel Book preserved in the Chaldean Patriarchate in this town⁵⁴ (fig. 12).

The place of the miniature in our manuscript deserves attention as well. The scene precedes the text of John (chapter 11) which tells how Jewish priests reacted on hearing about the raising of Lazarus. Placing the miniature of the Entry into Jerusalem side by side with this text the Syrian painter follows the idea developed by John only. In his text the miracle of the resuscitation in Bethany is connected with the exultation of the people, who having seen what Jesus has done, recognise him as the Messiah and honour him as the anointed king.

The manuscript contains no miniature which represents or alludes to the Passion of Jesus. The pictorial narrative goes directly from the Entry into Jerusalem to the events which took place after his death. The first picture (fol. 126r) in this group shows the Resurrection (fig. 13). Six

⁵² *A descriptive catalogue of the Arabic and Persian manuscripts in the Library of the University of Edinburgh*, ed. Mohammed Hukk, H. Ethé, E. Robertson, Edinburgh 1925, p. 136-37.

⁵³ Cf. the miniatures in the following manuscripts: Paris, Collection of Pozzi; Rome, BV, Syr. 118, Syr. 559, Borg. 169; London, BL, Or. 3372, Add. 7170; Deir ez-Za'farān, Qaraqoş, Mar Giwargis, Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, pl. 53:2, 55:2, 86:2, 145:1, 66, 86:1.

⁵⁴ The miniature belongs to the suite of the pictures which at present decorates the manuscript Paris, BN, Syr. 344, Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 417.

soldiers are sleeping before the tomb in the garden suggested by a green background and red, stylised plants. The stone is already rolled back. We may note that here again two points of view are applied. The inscription identifies the tomb and the soldiers as Jews guarding the grave. The upper part of the miniature is difficult to interpret. Two bearded men, each with his right hand raised, are kneeling before a young man. His body is injured and we can only see that he is holding up his left hand. Behind the kneeling men a woman stands. Both her hands are raised. The inscription identifies her as Mary, the two men as angels and the young man as Christ.

In the Eastern tradition the most common formula of the Resurrection follows the text of Mark and represents the three Holy Women arriving at the tomb.⁵⁵ Instead of the missing Jesus they see an angel who tells them about the Resurrection. In the Gospel of Matthew only two women visit the tomb. According to Luke there were three of them and they met two angels; the Evangelist mentions that Peter also saw the empty grave. Finally John relates how Mary of Magdala brought Peter and the Other Disciple and showed them the empty tomb. When they had left the garden Jesus appeared to her.

Since the miniature is preceded by the text of John which ends with the *Noli me tangere* event we could suppose that the representation also relies on John. Consequently the women should represent Mary of Magdala, the two kneeling figures two angels seen by her outside the grave and the young man sitting on the left Jesus, just as the second hand inscription maintains. In the two bearded male persons without wings one would rather be inclined to see the disciples than the angels, the more so since a formula is known which shows Peter and John accompanying the Holy Women at the grave.⁵⁶ However it seems more probably

⁵⁵ J. Vilette, *La résurrection du Christ dans l'art chrétien du 2^e au 7^e siècle*, Paris 1957, part II: La visite des Saintes Femmes au tombeau; A. Grabar, "Essai sur les plus anciennes représentations de la Résurrection du Christ", *Monuments Piot* 63 (1980) 105-41. The Syrian painters usually followed Matthew and represented two women at the grave, for instance in the following manuscripts: Paris, BN, Syr. 33, Jerusalem, Syrian Orthodox Monastery of St. Marc, Cod. 28, Berlin, Preussische Bibliothek, Sachau 304, cf. Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, pls 36:2, 101:4, 126:1. Sometimes they incorporated the *Noli me tangere* episode in this scene, for instance in the manuscripts Paris, BN, Syr. 599, London, BL, Add. 7170, cf. *ibid.*, pls 79:2, 93.

⁵⁶ Two apostles and the Holy Women at the grave appear in Armenian representations, for instance in the wall-painting decorating the Church of the Holy Cross in Aght'amar or in the manuscript in Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, Ms. 1918, S. Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar: Church of the Holy Cross*, Cambridge Mass. 1965, p. 45, pl. 69; *eadem*, *The Chester Beatty Library: a Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts*, Dublin

that even in this case the author of the miniature did not pay attention to the iconographical rules but created a picture which strictly follows the illustrated text.

The next picture (fol. 147v) shows two women approaching two sitting men (fig. 13). The miniature is placed at the end of the text of Luke relating Jesus' last appearance to the disciples, and before the text of Mark about the Holy Women, which starts on the next page. The person who supplied the miniatures with the inscriptions must have been very uncertain about the subject of this picture and left it without any explanation.

Judging from the place of the miniature in the text we can be certain that it still belongs to the Resurrection series. Since the gestures of the men may express astonishment and those of the women despair, we may assume that the painter depicted here in abbreviated form the moment when the Holy Women tell the Apostles about the empty grave, and their meeting with an angel — a scene which is very seldom represented, whether in Eastern or Western art.⁵⁷

Between the two texts on the Resurrection mentioned above one more miniature is inserted (fol. 148r) (fig. 14). It represents four kneeling persons with raised hands. Above them there is a winged youngish figure soaring in the air. The scene is displayed against a red and green background. The black stripes visible on the red part probably depict a flash of lightning. On the green part the stars are represented. The added inscription reads: "... and (he) was taken up into heaven".

The Ascension with Christ ascending into heaven with the help of wings is without any doubt an unusual scene. Taking into consideration the general Islamic character of the manuscript J. Leroy supposed that the scene had been influenced by Islamic iconography, particularly by the scene representing the Ascension of Muhammad, when the prophet is carried to heaven by the winged Buraq or by an angel.⁵⁸ He also pointed out the similarity between the figure of Christ in our miniature and the representation of Christ in the Ascension scenes composed by the Islamic

1958, p. 56. Some early Ethiopian miniatures (for instance in the Gospel Books from the Monasteries of Hayq, Kəbran and Däq) represent Peter, John, Mary of Magdala, Christ and an angel, E. Hammerschmidt, *Äthiopische Handschriften von Tanäsee, I*, Wiesbaden 1973, fig. 38; *Ethiopia: Manuscripts à peinture*, Paris 1961, pl. XVI.

⁵⁷ Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie* (see n. 37 above), p. 554.

⁵⁸ Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, p. 401-402. See also R. Ettinghausen, "Persian Ascension Miniatures of the XIV Century", [in:] *Islamic Art and Archaeology: Collected Papers*, Berlin 1984, p. 244-67.

painters, as for instance in this in the miniature of the Turkish manuscript containing *Zübdetü'l Tevârih* "Cream of Histories", illuminated by Seyyid Loqman, (Istanbul, Türk-İslam Eserleri Museum, Ms nr. 1973)⁵⁹ (fig. 15).

It seems however that the painter did not need Islamic art to provide the inspiration for his Ascension. He could find it in the repertory of Christian art. The subject of the Christ-Angel developed on the basis of Old Testament texts which many times name the Messiah as the Messenger of God, the Messenger of the Covenant, or the Angel of Great Counsel (Mal. III:1; Is. IX,6). The Psalmist imagines God riding on the wings of wind (Ps. CIII:3). These ideas were taken over by early Church Fathers, first by Justin, and later by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.⁶⁰ The ante-Nicene tradition recognises the Word of God in the angels of the Biblical theophanies. For instance according to the oriental Church Fathers the Christ of the Trinity who appeared to Abraham and Sarah in Mamre had the form of an angel.⁶¹ When represented in art this scene shows Christ with wings and sometimes with a cruciform nimbus.⁶²

The winged Christ is represented in the Crucifixion scene in the wall-painting in the churches of the Monastery of Choziba and that of the Holy Cross in Aght'amar.⁶³ In a group of manuscripts containing the homilies of Gregory Nazianzen the picture of the Christ-Angel, understood as the Logos, illustrates his second paschal homily.⁶⁴

In the 13th century the Byzantine iconographers introduced a sophisticated, symbolic figure of the Angel-Wisdom represented as a winged person wearing a cruciform nimbus.⁶⁵ The christological interpretation

⁵⁹ G. Renda, "The Miniatures of the Zubdat al-Tawarikh", [in:] *Turkish Treasures*, vol. I, Istanbul 1978, p. 26-35.

⁶⁰ For the problem of the Christ-Angel in the texts of the Church Fathers see J. Barbelos, *Christus-Angelos*, Bonn 1941.

⁶¹ J. Meyerdorff, "L'icographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la tradition byzantine", *Cahiers archéologiques* 10 (1959) 268. See also A. M. Amman, "Slavische 'Christus-Engel'-Darstellungen", *OCP* 6 (1940) 467-94.

⁶² Meyerdorff, "L'icographie de la Sagesse Divine" (see n. 61 above), fig. 5.

⁶³ Y. Meimaris, "The Hermitage of St. John the Chozibite, Deir Wady El-Quilt", *Liber Annuus* 28 (1978) 181-186, figs 12-13; Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar* (see n. 56 above), pl. 69.

⁶⁴ S. Der Nersessian, "Note sur quelques images se rattachant au thème du Christ-Ange", [in:] *Études byzantines et arméniennes*, Louvain 1973, p. 43-47.

⁶⁵ Meyerdorff, "L'icographie de la Sagesse Divine" (see n. 61 above), p. 269-77.



Fig. 3. London, BL, Add. 7174, f. 193r



Fig. 4. London, BL, Add. 7174, f. 21v-22r



Fig. 5-a. Rome, BV, Borgianus 169, f. 40r

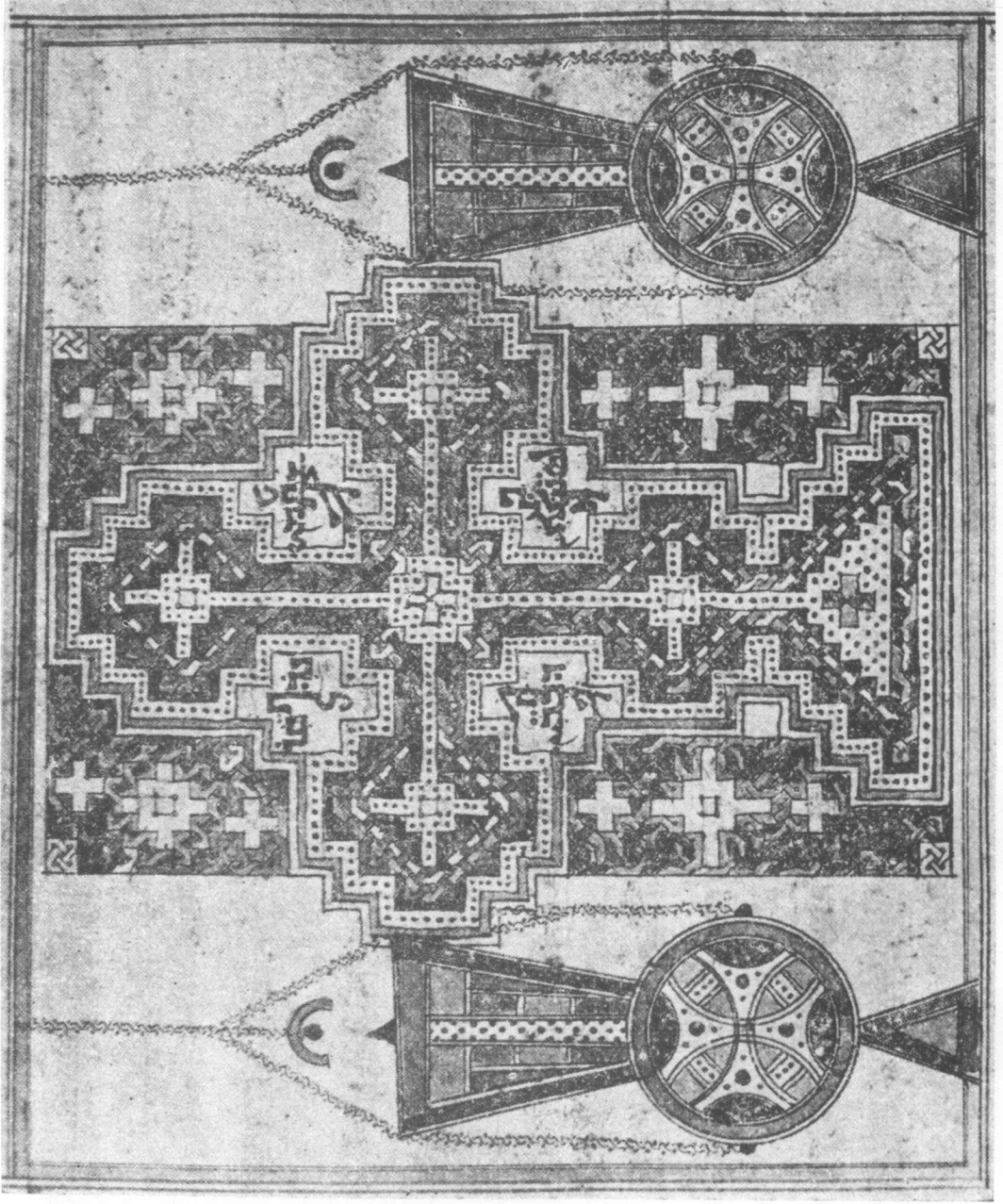


Fig. 5-b. Rome, BV, Borgianus 169

شاه آنگد پو اول خورشيد با نو
جھان آردی باشنه تاج زردی
سحرگاه اول باغ کوردی قو آ نو

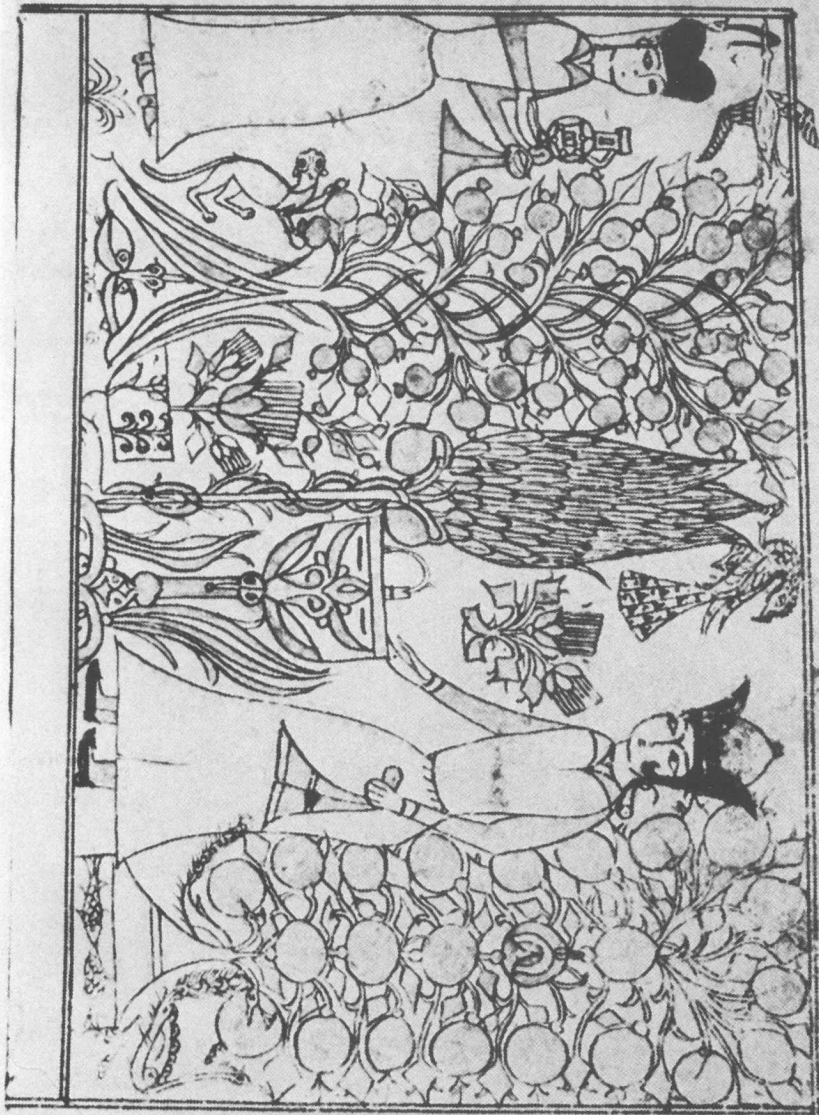


Fig. 6. Paris, BN, turc. 355, f. 28r



Fig. 8. St. Petersburg, Oriental Institute, Syr. 26



Fig. 9. London, BL, Add. 7174, f. 12v



Fig. 10. Edinburgh, University Library, Ms. 161, f. 165v



Fig. 11. London, BL, Add; 7174, f. 97v



Fig. 12. Mosul, Chaldean Partiarhate



וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח
 אֶת-הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּם
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַמָּוֶל
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַבְּרִיָּה
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַיָּמִים
 הָאֵלֶּם וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַמָּוֶל
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַבְּרִיָּה
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַיָּמִים
 הָאֵלֶּם וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַמָּוֶל
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַבְּרִיָּה

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח
 אֶת-הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּם
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַמָּוֶל
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַבְּרִיָּה
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַיָּמִים
 הָאֵלֶּם וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַמָּוֶל
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַבְּרִיָּה
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַיָּמִים
 הָאֵלֶּם וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַמָּוֶל
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַבְּרִיָּה



Fig. 14. London, BL, Add. 7174, f. 148r

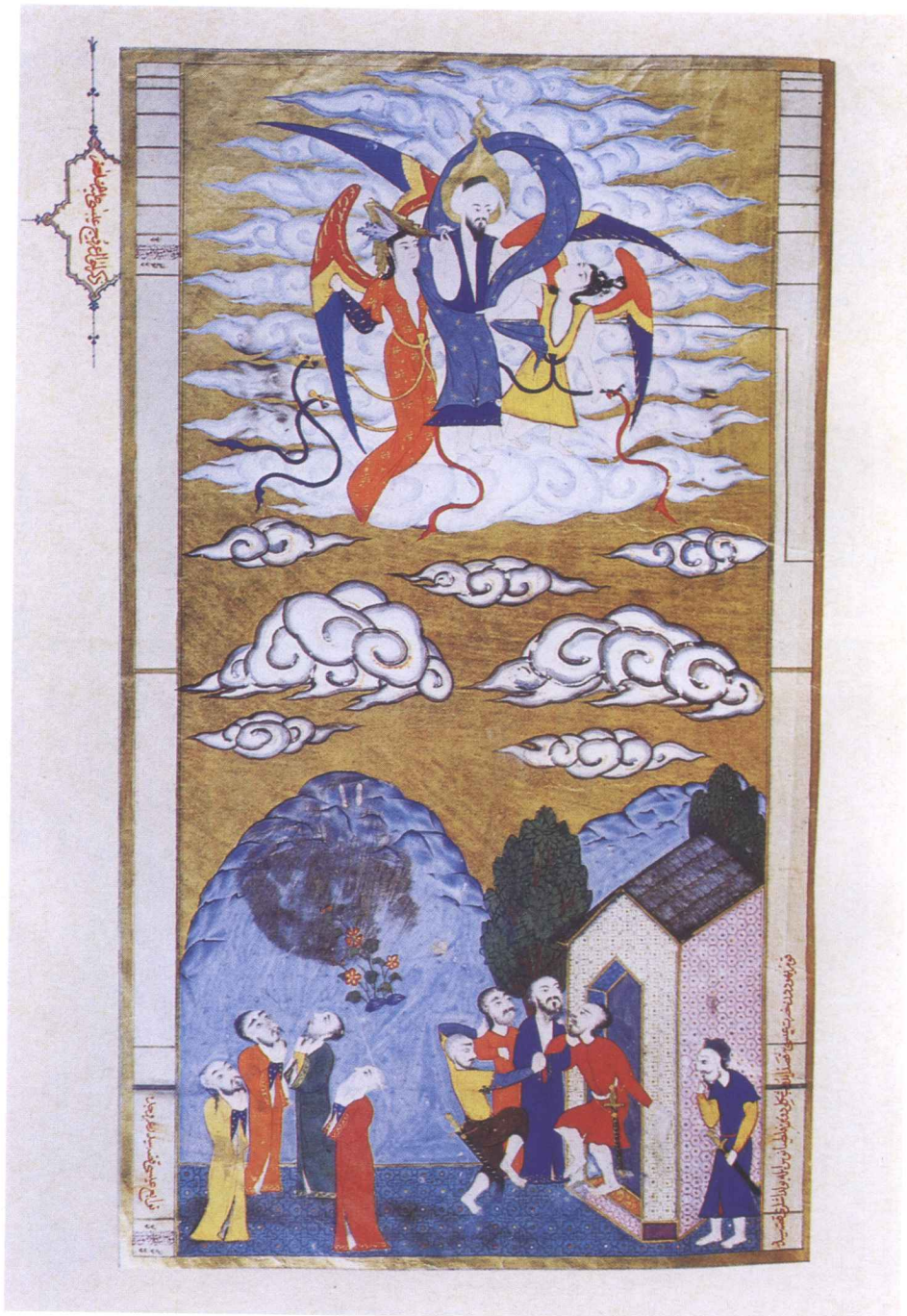


Fig. 15. İstanbul, Türk-İslam Eserleri Müzesi, Ms. nr. 1973, f. 46r

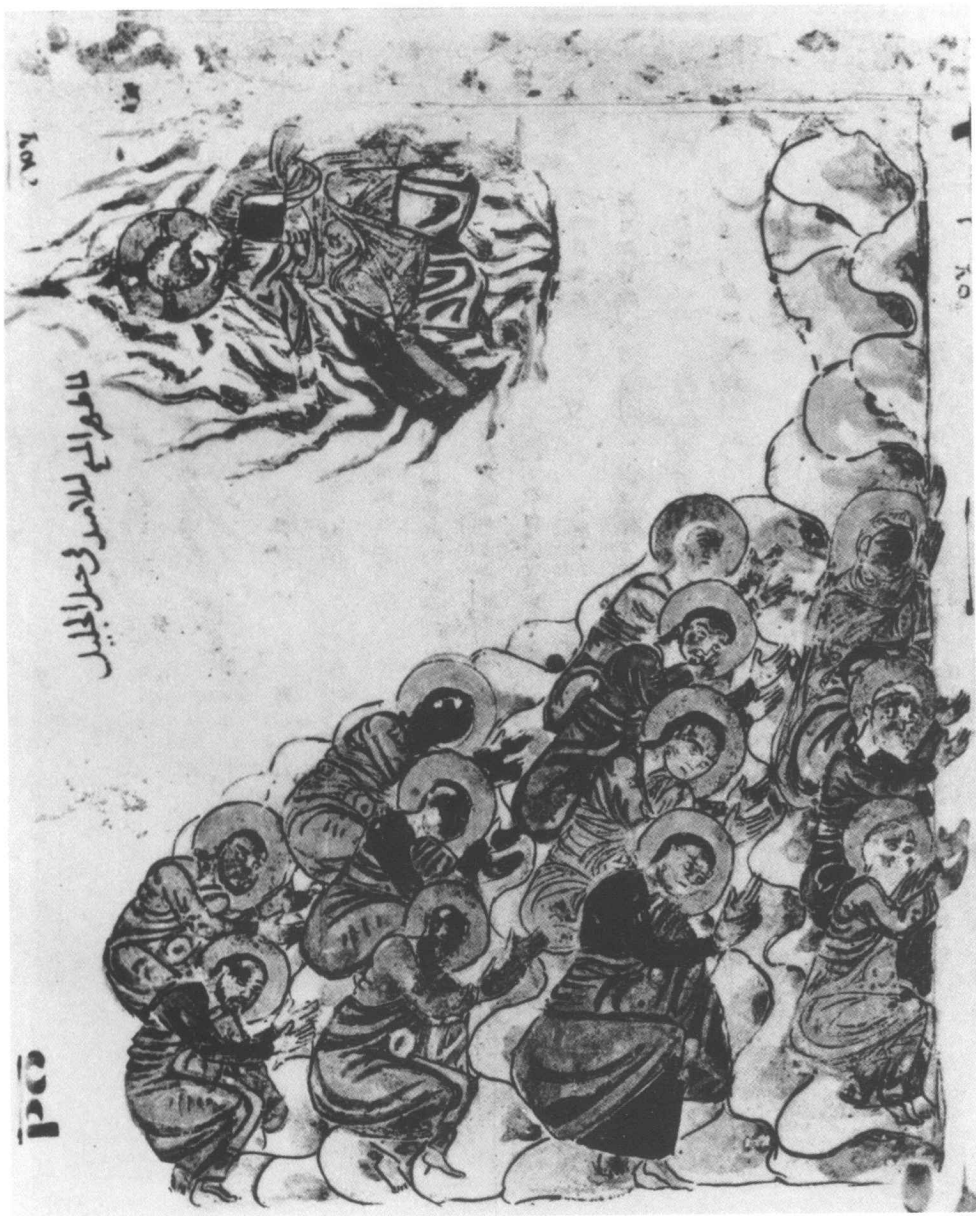


Fig. 16. Paris, BN, Copte 13, f. 218v



Fig. 17. Gotland, Hajnum church

<p> <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه <u>بَغْتَبِنَد</u> . جِهَلَا <u>دِهْ دِهْ</u> جِهَلَا . نَهْ جِهَه <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . جِهَلَا <u>دِهْ دِهْ</u> جِهَلَا . جِهَلَا <u>دِهْ دِهْ</u> جِهَلَا . جِهَلَا <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه </p>	<p> <u>لَهْ كَهَنَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه <u>دِهْ دِهْ</u> جِهَلَا . جِهَلَا <u>دِهْ دِهْ</u> جِهَلَا . جِهَلَا <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه <u>دِهْ دِهْ</u> جِهَلَا . جِهَلَا <u>دِهْ دِهْ</u> جِهَلَا . جِهَلَا <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه <u>نَهْ جِهَه</u> . نَهْ جِهَه </p>
---	---



Fig. 18. London, BL, Add. 7174, f. 152v

of this subject developed on the basis of the canon for Holy Thursday written by the hymnographer of Syrian origin, Cosmas of Maiuma.⁶⁶

The eschatological character of our miniature, which the painter expressed by a dark, densely starred sky and flashes of lightning shooting across the burning red air, belongs to early Christian tradition. We find it in theophanies represented on Palestinian pilgrims' flasks dated to the 6th century.⁶⁷ Our miniature must be compared in the first place with the Ascension from the Coptic Gospel Book written at the end of the 12th century (Paris, BN, Copte 13).⁶⁸ We can see there Christ in heaven surrounded by an aureole of flames. In front of him twelve apostles show reverence by bowing down in *proskynesis* (fig. 16). The miniature illustrates the passage in Luke about the last appearance of Jesus to the disciples, that is, the text which precedes the Ascension in our manuscript.

When J. Leroy analysed this scene he pointed out the unique character of the representation and mentioned that no other images of Christ ascending to heaven on his own wings can be found in the repertory of Christian art. It seems however that the same idea had been applied in a relief from the church in Hajnum on the Swedish island of Gotland, dated to the end of the 12th century⁶⁹ (fig. 17). It shows in the upper register a winged figure standing on a half circle and flanked by four persons. Two of them touch the wings of the central figure, two others are winged themselves. In the lower register four haloed persons are represented on either side of a column. The relief is damaged and we cannot see if each of them holds a staff or if the role of these vertical elements is to separate the four figures. Since another similar relief in this church represents the Crucifixion we may surmise that the scene in question is also christological.⁷⁰ It could be the Resurrection, with Christ surrounded by the angels and with four guards at the grave shown in the lower register, or the Ascension in the presence of four angels and four apostles. The problem is difficult to solve but what is important to us is simply the fact that Christ ascends to heaven on his own wings.

⁶⁶ *Anthologia Graeca Carminum Christianorum*, ed. W. Christ & M. Paranikas, Lipsiae 1871, p. 194-96.

⁶⁷ Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte* (see n. 38 above), pls XXXIII-XXXVI, LIII.

⁶⁸ S. Shenouda, *The miniatures of the Paris manuscript "Copte 13"*, Princeton 1956, p. 170-72; J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits coptes et coptes-arabes illustrés*, Paris 1974, p. 139.

⁶⁹ *Sveriges kyrkor: Gotland, vol. II*, ed. S. Curman & J. Roosval, Stockholm 1935, p. 163-77; E. Lagerlöf & G. Svahnström, *Gotlands kyrkor*, Arlöv 1984, p. 175-78.

⁷⁰ *Sveriges kyrkor: Gotland, vol. II*, figs 248-249.

Even if similarity between the Syrian miniature and the Gotland relief cannot be explained by the contacts between these two artistic milieus, the existence of a common, most probably oriental Christian source, is obvious.

In the last miniature (fol. 152v) four men dressed in different colours are represented on a uniform green background (fig. 18). Two of them are sitting with their left hands raised, one is kneeling with both hands raised and one looks up and points upwards. No inscription is visible. The text on the same page is taken from chapter 16 of John, that is Jesus' farewell speech to the disciples before the Passion. The picture is not informative at all but we may suppose that we are dealing here with a highly abbreviated scene of the Coming of the Holy Spirit,⁷¹ depicting only four apostles who with their gestures express astonishment, reverence and worship. Our hypothesis is also supported on the fact that the miniature is the last of the series illustrating the manuscript. Moreover in the farewell speech which precedes the miniature Jesus promises to send the Holy Ghost. The absence of the Dove is not surprising here if we take in consideration the fact that it was also omitted in the miniature of the Baptism.

We may now try to summarise the observations reached in this investigation.

The Evangelistary from Tell Ziqufa is in many aspects an unusual codex. On one hand it represents a very high level of workmanship in the matter of calligraphy and artistic design. On the other hand, the miniatures have rather the nature of sketches and are lacking in skill. There is good reason to believe that only one person was responsible for the production of the whole book. Elias, who in the dedicatory note presents himself as a scribe, seems also to have illustrated the manuscript. However not being educated in this area he did not consider it necessary to follow the rules which usually are binding for painters, but most often applies his own.

⁷¹ A. Grabar, "Le schéma iconographique de la Pentecôte", [in:] *idem, L'Art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, Paris 1968, p. 616-27. The Syrians when representing the Pentecost applied either the early Christian formula with the apostles sitting in a row and illuminated by rays of light, as for instance in the Gospel Books: London, BL, Add. 7169 and Preussische Bibliothek, Sachau 304, or the Byzantine type which gathers the apostles in a semicircular group and adds representatives of the converted people in the centre, as for instance in the Gospels from the private collection in Diyarbakır and in the Monastery in Deir ez-Za'farān, cf. Leroy, *Mss. Syr.*, figs 124:1, 126:2, 101:3, 134:2.

Many of our observations above support this conclusion. Firstly, looking at the manuscript as a whole we immediately get the impression that its decorativeness is not really of a kind a painter could create. The artist concentrates on the scripture. He writes in a beautiful decorative style and often transforms the characters into pictures. He plays with scribal flourishes and uses many aniconic motifs for the decoration. The miniatures are subordinated to the text. They begin to appear where the text of reading comes to an end, and take only as much place as it allows. Their main rôle is only to decorate, not to illustrate the story of Christ's life. Consequently the artist feels no need to place them in such a way that the reader can easily contemplate them and follow their narrative. He chooses his subjects arbitrarily and the result is that he has composed a christological cycle which can be found nowhere else.

By transforming miniatures into a kind of decorative surface he has managed to hide his lack of skill in the drawing and painting of the human body. To the same end he always applies figures of one type only and simplifies more complicated scenes. This does not worry him because he is not conscious that there exist definite iconographical traditions to follow. He is not familiar with them and usually creates pictures more or less his own, guided by the texts he knows. The most obvious example is the scene with the twelve Magi.

All these characteristics make his manuscript a unique work and leaves it without any parallels. Consequently we may be sure that the manuscript is not an example of one more pictorial tradition which elsewhere has disappeared, as J. Leroy once supposed, but a result of individual creation by the scribe, who decided to produce the whole book according to his own concept.

Uppsala University
Department of Byzantine Studies
Box 513
S-751 20 Uppsala, Sweden

Ewa Balicka-Witakowska

